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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: ADANA'S WILY OLD FOX ON THE ART OF POLITICS

REF: A. ADANA 19
[1](#)B. ADANA 15
[1](#)C. ADANA 12
[1](#)D. 08 ADANA 50

Classified By: Adana Principal Officer Eric Green, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

This is a Consulate Adana cable.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Turkey's longest-serving big-city mayor, Aytac Durak in Adana, proved unusually talkative in recent meetings with us. He highlighted service, independence, and being able to turn tables on one's opponents as keys to his success in the Turkish political game. Durak's career underscores an enduring fact of Turkish political life: personality usually trumps party labels as an indicator of political success. After leaving the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), he confounded his erstwhile party colleagues by winning his fifth term as Mayor of Adana in the March 2009 local elections under the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) banner. Although being in an opposition party has given Durak greater freedom to speak his mind, criticize the national government, and to play the victim, his municipality has also felt the pain of tightened purse strings as the AKP is no longer inclined to reward a city now in the enemy camp. END SUMMARY.

Claim to Nonpartisan Service

[1](#)2. (C) In recent meetings with Consul and poloff, an unusually talkative Adana Mayor Aytac Durak shared with us some of his thoughts on what has allowed him to survive "and thrive" in Turkish politics. Durak claimed that first and foremost it was his ability to provide services to his constituents that delivered a record fifth term as mayor of Adana in the March 2009 local elections. He said his experience as an engineer combined with his natural intelligence allowed him to deliver what the citizens of Adana needed and wanted. The mayor proudly displays a poster in his office of a blow-up of a newspaper front page announcing his first mayoral victory in 1984, which indicated that he would not bring partisanship to municipality services. He highlights this independence and nonpartisanship as his motto for his administrations. With a grin, Durak claimed the poster caused Prime Minister Recep

Tayyip Erdogan, whom he unflatteringly compared to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, some consternation when Durak hosted him in his office after his 2004 victory (when Durak won under the AKP banner).

Flag of Convenience

13. (C) Nevertheless, Durak acknowledged that there was a heavy price to be paid for his falling out with the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) (REF A). He said he lost about 30 points on a 100-point scale by being on the "outs" with the AKP. He said he loses more points by refusing to play the party patronage game. Last, he claimed to lose yet more points by violating the cardinal rule of politics: remembering people's names. (Comment: We suspect Durak was being somewhat self-deprecating here. After over 45 years in politics, we suspect that he has a substantial mental rolodex of contacts and acquaintances. End Comment.)

14. (C) Durak noted that when he left the AKP in the months leading up to the March 2009 local elections, he had initially thought to run as an independent but he was convinced by his advisers that he needed the umbrella of a national party organization (REF B). Durak claimed that MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli accepted his candidacy on Durak's terms and understood that Durak would not open the municipality as a network of patronage for MHP members. "Did you see a gaggle of MHP members outside my door waiting for jobs?" he asked rhetorically. Though one journalist contact told us local MHP officials claim Durak has accepted one of

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them as a political advisor, we expect the mayor to keep his new party at arm's length. Durak further underlined his independence when we queried his thoughts on the prospects for Abdullahlatif Sener's new Turkey Party (TP). Durak wished Sener success -- implying that he is much more sympathetic to the TP's center-right approach than with MHP's strident nationalism.

15. (C) Durak noted that, in the end, the MHP national organization did practically nothing for him during the local election campaign and he had to rely mostly on his own resources. But he said that being a member of MHP did allow him to be much more vocal now in his criticism of the central government. As a member of an opposition party, he could more openly tap into Adana's feeling of neglect and resentment toward the GOT. When he was a member of the AKP, he had to be much more discreet about his complaints, he said. Durak suggested that "when" he runs for a sixth term, he may revisit that idea of running as an independent. (The day he stops working will probably be the day he dies, he joked; in 2014, he'll be 76 years old.)

Adana the Step Child

16. (C) In a June 12 conversation, the Mayor noted his disappointment with this year's International Golden Boll Film Festival, held in Adana during June 8-14, saying "the people of Adana are happy, but I'm not." Although this was the 16th such festival held in Adana, the Golden Boll Festival's profile is dwarfed by Antalya's Golden Orange Film Festival. Durak praised the efforts of the local press and others to highlight the disparity of support from the GOT for Antalya's festival versus Adana's festival. On June 5, the daily "Ekspres" complained: "Is Adana a step child?" The next day the chairman of Adana's Arts Council, Haluk Uygur, echoed that complaint in a written statement to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, noting that the government had allocated 5 million TL (about \$3.2 million) to the Golden Orange Festival but only 250,000 TL (roughly \$160,000) to the Golden Boll. Uygur also pointed out that state-run Turkish

Radio and Television, which had previously aired the Golden Boll Festival live every year, discontinued the practice this year.

17. (C) Mayor Durak suggested to us the AKP government's lack of support was a direct result of his now being a member of an opposition party. He had earlier noted that, although the allocation to the city's budget coming from the central government was largely fixed based on the city's population, there were various discretionary funds for roads and other projects that could flow to the city. In the wake of his March victory, these funds had dried up. Durak is not alone in his concern about the fiscal squeeze being placed on the city. On May 29, the chairman of the board of the Chamber of Commerce, Saban Bas, told us that in light of the local election results, the AKP now considered Adana to be a "dead city."

AKP Takes More Revenge

18. (C) On May 4, the AKP government also sought to clip Durak's wings by removing him from the chairmanship of the Turkish Municipalities Union (TBB), saying the March local elections required a new TBB board. Durak cried foul, noting that the government had violated proper procedure and that the High Election Board had not yet even officially published the results of the elections. Probably anticipating he had no chance to be re-elected to the TBB chairmanship, Durak boycotted the May 28 TBB convention, where AKP Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas was elected. In early June, Durak decided not to run again for the chairmanship of the Cukurova Municipalities Union, a position he had held for 12 years -- a self-abnegating move that sympathetic local press hailed as a "democratic lesson to everyone."

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Playing the Victim Works

19. (C) Durak claimed the second rule of politics was being able to turn your opponents' attacks to your advantage. The controversy surrounding the funding for Golden Boll Film Festival has allowed the mayor to assume the mantle of victimhood in the face of the AKP's attempts to punish him. The press scrutiny of the disparity of GOT support for the Golden Orange versus the Golden Boll apparently put the AKP government on the defensive. In fact, as we spoke, Durak fielded a telephone call from Culture and Tourism Minister Ertugrul Gunay, who apologized for not attending the festival and promised to increase the government's funding. After the call, Durak quipped, "See, I did not even have to do anything. That's politics."

Comment

110. (C) Although rumors persist that the government wants prosecutors to file corruption charges -- probably deserved -- against Durak, for now, he is reveling in the role of David to the AKP's Goliath. Durak's success shows that, at least at the local level, personality can trump party identification (and the AKP's strong organization and deep pockets) at the ballot box (REFS C and D). Durak has suggested reinforcing this by changing the election law to allow municipal election ballots to show the candidates' photographs and names rather than the party symbol, like the nonpartisan elections of village or neighborhood muhtars (headmen). The AKP government has signaled that local government administration and election law reform are on its agenda, but Durak's idea is unlikely to gain traction with party leaders in Ankara obsessed with maintaining a tight

grip of control. Nonetheless, now serving under his fourth party banner, we expect the mayor to call the shots in his marriage of convenience with the MHP, which surely will quickly learn that Durak will always put his interests ahead of any party's.

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